



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

# News Release

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**ICE ARRESTS 14 MEMBERS & ASSOCIATES OF MS-13 GANG IN NEW JERSEY ON  
DRUG CONSPIRACY, DOCUMENT FRAUD, AND IMMIGRATION VIOLATIONS**  
*-- Suspected leader of MS-13 clique in Elizabeth is among those arrested --*

NEWARK, N.J. – Christopher J Christie, United States Attorney for the District of New Jersey, and Kyle Hutchins, Special Agent-in-Charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Newark, today announced that 14 members and associates of the violent street gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), including the gang’s suspected local leader, have been arrested in Elizabeth and Somerset, New Jersey.

Thirteen of the gang members were arrested on criminal complaints issued in the District of New Jersey. The criminal complaints charge ten of these individuals with conspiracy to distribute cocaine and crack cocaine, and three of these individuals with conspiracy to transfer false identification documents. The narcotics count carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a \$1 million fine. The false document count carries a five-year maximum prison term and a \$250,000 fine. The remaining one individual was charged with administrative immigration violations, specifically Section 212 (a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

The arrests, which began at 4:00 AM this morning, involved more than 100 federal, state, and local law enforcement officers. They were the culmination of an eight-month investigation called “Operation Spiderweb,” which was conducted by the ICE Newark Special Agent-in-Charge Office, in conjunction with the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the New Jersey State Police, the Union County Prosecutor’s Office, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Middlesex County Sheriff’s Department, the Monmouth County Prosecutor’s Office, and the Plainfield Police Department.

The investigation targeted suspected criminal members and associates of the MS-13 street gang operating in Elizabeth area. The probe was significantly enhanced through the use of court-authorized wire intercepts on cellular phones utilized by members of the Elizabeth MS-13 gang

These wire intercepts helped investigators develop critical evidence against **Melvin Murillo**, a 27-year-old native of El Salvador suspected of being the leader of the Elizabeth MS-13 street gang, as well as several of his gang associates. ICE agents arrested Murillo this morning on a criminal charge of conspiracy to distribute narcotics. Murillo and the other criminal defendants are scheduled to have initial appearances today at 2:00 PM before U.S. Magistrate Judge Ronald J. Hedges.

During the arrests and searches this morning, law enforcement officers seized two handguns, a quantity of suspected cocaine, as well as fraudulent Social Security and immigration documents. One suspect was attempting to flush these documents down the toilet when agents arrived at his residence.

“Taking these individuals off the streets will make the neighborhoods of Elizabeth a safer place for everyone. ICE is especially grateful to its law enforcement partners in New Jersey for making this important operation possible,” said ICE Special Agent-in-Charge Hutchins. “Today’s case is the latest enforcement action in ICE’s national anti-gang initiative called ‘Operation Community Shield,’ which has resulted in the arrest of more than 300 MS-13 gang members nationwide since February.”

Operation Community Shield is a national ICE initiative designed to disrupt, dismantle and prosecute violent gang organizations by employing the full range of authorities and investigative tools available to ICE. Under the initiative, ICE employs its broad immigration authorities (both criminal and administrative) against gang members, as well as its customs authorities in targeting narcotics smuggling, money laundering, and in seeking the forfeiture of assets of gang members.

“MS-13 has a reputation in this country and abroad as being among the most vicious and remorseless street gangs, as they establish and protect territory and stake out their claims in various illegal ventures,” said U.S. Attorney Christie. “They are relatively new in New Jersey, and we intend to stamp them out before they flourish here. We can do that with this kind of cooperative effort between federal agents, state and local law enforcement and the New Jersey Attorney General’s Office.”

The individuals charged and arrested as part of today’s operation are:

- 1) **Melvin Murillo**, native of El Salvador, (dob 12/18/77), a resident of Elizabeth and leader of Elizabeth clique of MS-13, charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy
- 2) **Antonio Romero**, resident of Elizabeth, charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy
- 3) **Wilber Larin Romero**, native of El Salvador, (dob 12/13/85), resident of Elizabeth, charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy.
- 4) **Didier Zuniga**, native of Honduras, (dob 8/2/81), resident of Elizabeth, an alleged drug supplier charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy.
- 5) **Elmer Antonio Landaverde**, native of El Salvador, (dob 6/16/81), resident of Elizabeth, charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy.
- 6) **Marber Ramirez**, native of El Salvador, (dob 12/17/75), resident of Elizabeth, charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy.
- 7) **Jose Rodriguez**, native of El Salvador, (dob 4/13/83), resident of Elizabeth, charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy.
- 8) **Maykol Rangel-Munoz**, native of Colombia, (dob 6/4/81), resident of Elizabeth, charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy.
- 9) **Felipe Arboleda**, native of Colombia, (dob 6/20/70), resident of Elizabeth, is the alleged drug supplier of Melvin Murillo and others, charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy.
- 10) **Mike Jimenez**, native of the United States, (dob 9/2/83), resident of Elizabeth, charged with narcotics distribution conspiracy.
- 11) **Hector Martinez**, native of Honduras, (dob 1/18/60), resident of Elizabeth, an alleged supplier of false identity documents charged with document fraud conspiracy.

- 12) **Ronal Murillo**, native of El Salvador, (dob 4/3/72), resident of Elizabeth, the older brother of Melvin Murillo charged with document fraud conspiracy.
- 13) **Julio Murillo**, native of El Salvador, (dob 1/9/84), resident of Elizabeth, the younger brother of Melvin Murillo charged with document fraud conspiracy.
- 14) **Jose Monroy**, native of Honduras, (dob 7/11/67), resident of Elizabeth, charged with administrative immigration violation.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*